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## Chocolate – The Bad and the Ugly

-Dr. Jacky May



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As Halloween approaches, there is no better time to point out that candy is not limited to causing problems in overindulging children. Chocolate can actually be toxic to pets depending on the type and amount ingested. Be certain to store all your chocolate candies out of reach of your pets.

Chocolate contains substances called methylxanthines which are similar to caffeine. When ingested by pets in small amounts methylxanthines may cause digestive upset (vomiting and diarrhea), panting, hyperactivity, and excessive thirst. In larger amounts they can cause more serious signs such as abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, seizures, and even death.

Different types of chocolate have different amounts of the methylxanthines. White chocolate has the lowest level followed by milk chocolate and seldom do pets ingest enough of those types to do more than cause an upset stomach. Dark chocolate (semi-sweet) has a higher amount and can cause more severe problems if too much is ingested. Baker's chocolate has the highest amounts and can easily be a toxic problem even with small amounts of ingestion.

Examples amounts of different chocolates that could affect a typical 20 pound dog are :

	Very mild	Mild to Moderate	Moderate to Severe
Milk Chocolate	2.25 ounces	4 ounces	7 ounces
Dark Chocolate (semi sweet)	0.75 ounces	1.5 ounces	2.75 ounces
Baker's Chocolate (unsweetened)	0.25 ounces	0.5 ounces	1.00 ounces
Cocoa Powder (unsweetened)	0.1 ounces	0.25 ounces	0.5 ounces

Bear in mind that these amounts are estimates and can vary depending on the brand of chocolate and the manufacturing process. Also be aware that susceptibility to chocolate toxicosis varies according to a dog's individual sensitivity and pre-existing health issues.

What steps should you take if your pet ingests chocolate? Use the above guide as a reference. If it is an amount and type of chocolate that is likely to cause moderate to severe signs then definite action should be taken in the form of seeking veterinary assistance and monitoring for the dog.

If you know that it has been less than an hour since the ingestion then you can try to induce vomiting at home by administering hydrogen peroxide by mouth. The dose for hydrogen peroxide is 1 teaspoon (5 ml) per 5 pounds of body weight for a dog or cat. Do not exceed 3 tablespoons (45ml) per dose regardless of the size of the dog. This initial dose may be repeated safely once if the initial dose did not produce vomiting within 15 minutes.

If it has been longer than one hour since the ingestion of chocolate, then inducing vomiting might still help, but a great deal of the chocolate may already have been absorbed and other measures may be necessary.

Just recall, if you have a large dog and it has eaten only 2-3 small milk chocolate candies then the concern is minimal and you will not need to induce vomiting. You will cause more digestive upset trying to make them vomit than such a small amount of milk chocolate would have.

If you are not sure, then always call – either us or the Emergency Animal Clinic. It is helpful to know the type of chocolate and the rough amount that is missing when you do call so that we can tell you whether you have concern for serious toxicity or not.

Read more on chocolate toxicity on our website using [lifelearn](#) (just search for chocolate). Remember, the safest way to deal with chocolate toxicity is to keep the candies out the pets' reach!